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ABSTRACT

A study examined the impact of both gender and college experience on judgments of the importance of its factors that determine liking. Seniors and freshmen completed a survey on friend relationships. Participants provided demographic information about a best friend (i.e., where the friend is now, age, and sex), and rated the importance of similarity, proximity, familiarity, warmth, sincerity, competence, and physical attractiveness in the friendship. All subjects perceived sincerity, familiarity, and warmth to be more important than similarity, competence, proximity, and attractiveness. Likewise, similarity, competence, and proximity were all judged of equal importance, while similarity and competence were seen as more important than the friend's attractiveness. Freshmen found familiarity to be more important than did seniors, while seniors ranked competence and attractiveness to be more important to a good relationship than did the freshmen. The results suggest that beliefs about the importance of the factors that contribute to liking differ as a function of age. Still in questions, however, is whether the judgments of the importance of these factors to liking are veridical, and whether a friendship's longevity influences a subject's understanding of importance of the factors that contribute to liking. (Author/RJM)

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Why do I Like You?

Students' Understanding of the Impact of the Factors that Contribute to Liking.

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Running Head: FACTORS OF LIKING

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Poster presented through the Committee for Equality in Professional Opportunity at the 40th annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, March, 1994, New Orleans, LA. Correspondence may be addressed to the third author at the Department of Psychology, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC 28144 or at sbrownlo@achilles.catawba.edu.

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Abstract

We examined the impact of both gender and college experience on judgments of the importance of the factors that determine liking. Seniors and freshmen completed a survey on friend relationships. Participants provided demographic information about the friend (i.e., where the friend is now, age, and sex), and rated the importance of similarity, proximity, familiarity, warmth, sincerity, competence, and physical attractiveness to having a good friendship. All subjects perceived sincerity, familiarity, and warmth to be more important than similarity, competence, proximity, and attractiveness. In addition, similarity, competence, and proximity were all judged of equal importance, although similarity and competence were seen as more important than was attractiveness of the best friend. Freshmen found familiarity to be more important than did seniors, although seniors judged competence and attractiveness to be more important to a good relationship than did freshmen. The results suggest that beliefs about the importance of the factors that contribute to liking differ as a function of age. Still in question, however, is whether judgments of the importance of these factors to liking are veridical, and whether longevity of friendship impacts understanding of the importance of the factors that contribute to liking.

Why do I Like You?

Students' Understanding of the Impact of the Factors the Contribute to Liking.

People become friends--and stay friends--for a number of different reasons. Familiarity leads to interpersonal attraction (Zajonc, 1968) as people who are in proximity are better-liked (Burr, 1973). Moreover, familiarity and propinquity increase perceptions of similarity (Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-Otay, 1991), and similarity in personality and attitudes also predicts liking (Byrne, Griffitt, & Stefaniah, 1967; Duck & Craig, 1978; Verbrugge, 1977), especially when people spend a lot of time together (Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985). Thus, familiarity, proximity, and similarity are interdependent, and all are determinants of liking.

Personal characteristics are also important to the development of friendships, although all the traits we use to describe others can be adequately classified along the dimensions of competence, warmth, and sincerity (Norman, 1968). Finally, physical attractiveness positively impacts liking, as we like attractive people and perceive them to be socially skilled (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991).

Although the impact of each of these factors as determinants of liking is well-documented, little attention has been given to people's explicit knowledge of the relative importance of each of these determinants of liking, and the degree to which such beliefs are affected by gen nd age-related experience with friendships. We examined judgments of the importance of the determinants of liking--similarity, competence, attractiveness, proximity, sincerity, familiarity, and warmth--for a group of freshmen and seniors. It was hypothesized that seniors would be more likely to recognize the importance of proximity and similarity than would freshmen, given that seniors have experienced the turnover in friends more than have freshmen. We also expected that females would consider each determinant more important compared to

men, as women not only expect more from their friendships (Clark & Ayers, 1993), but are more socially perceptive regarding relationships (Sullins, 1992).

Method

Subjects and Procedure

Thirty-nine first-year students (20 female, 19 male) and 40 fourth-year (or beyond) students (20 female, 20 male) volunteered or received partial course credit to take a survey on friendships. Each participated in mixed-gender groups of two to eight. Upon entering the laboratory, each subject was told to think of his or her best friend, to write that person's initial at the bottom of the questionnaire, and to focus on that person and that person only while completing the survey. This procedure was employed so that subjects would consider only one friendship while answering the questions. The initials of the friend were covered over with a black marker when subjects finished.

General Information About the Friends

In order to ensure that those who participated in the study were eligible to do so, and to collect demographic information about the best friend, subjects indicated their sex, their best friends' sex and age, and revealed the present location of the best friend (from choices such as home, away at another school or town, and here at school). Subjects also indicated the status of their best friend (i.e., significant other, co-worker, schoolmate from home).

Measurement of the Importance of the Determinants of Liking

Several questions assessed perceptions of the importance of the various determinants of liking, and each was measured using a seven-point bipolar scale (endpoints labeled "not at all important"/ "very important"). Specifically, subjects were asked to judge the importance of sincerity, proximity, familiarity, similarity, warmth, competence, and physical attractiveness to having a good relationship with the best

friend.

Results

Overview

In order to examine the relative importance of each of the determinants of liking in relation to the others, and to examine the impact of of age and gender on judgments of how crucial each determinant is to a good relationship, the ratings for the importance of each liking determinant were entered in a 2 (Subject Sex) X 2 (Subject Class) X 7 (Liking Determinants) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor. Scheffé tests were used to examine differences between groups.

Relative Importance of the Determinants of Liking

As can be seen in Table 1, subjects perceived that the determinants of liking were differentially important to having a good friendship, $F(6, 450) = 110.08$, $p < .001$. Specifically, subjects perceived sincerity ($M = 6.82$), familiarity ($M = 6.27$), and warmth ($M = 6.06$) to be more important than similarity ($M = 4.42$), competence ($M = 4.29$), proximity ($M = 3.53$), and attractiveness ($M = 3.00$), all $ps < .05$. Although similarity and competence were seen as more important than proximity, this difference was not significant, $p > .05$, and both were judged as more important than was attractiveness of the best friend, all $ps < .05$.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Subject Sex

Not surprisingly, female subjects ($M = 5.13$) perceived that the determinants of liking were, in general, more important to a good relationship than did males ($M = 4.69$), $F(1, 75) = 6.43$, $p < .01$. However, the Subject Sex X Determinants interaction

did not approach significance, $F(1, 75) < 1$, ns, suggesting that men and women did not differ in their views of the importance of any given individual determinant of liking.

Class Year

Although freshmen and seniors did not differ in their opinion of the overall importance of the determinants of liking, $F(1, 75) < 1$, ns, these groups did differ somewhat in their judgments of the importance of each individual determinant of liking, $F(6, 450) = 1.99$, $p = .07$. As can be seen in Table 1, freshmen ($M = 6.48$) thought familiarity more important than did seniors ($M = 6.05$), $p < .05$, and seniors perceived that competence ($M = 4.65$) and physical attractiveness ($M = 3.20$) more crucial to a good relationship than freshmen ($Ms = 3.92$ and 2.80, respectively), $p < .05$. Also, seniors ($M = 3.70$) recognized the importance of proximity marginally more than did freshmen ($M = 3.35$), $p < .10$.

Class Year, Sex, and Determinants of Liking

Neither the Class X Sex nor the Class X Sex X Determinants interaction was significant, $F(1, 75) < 1$ and $F(6, 450) = 1.30$, both ns, respectively.

Location, Sex, and Status of Best Friend

When sex of best friend and location of best friend were included as factors in the foregoing analyses, the pattern of results obtained was not altered substantially. However, 14 subjects indicated that their best friend was also their significant other, and thus all analyses were recalculated excluding these subjects. The resultant pattern of results was basically unchanged, except that two gender differences emerged (women perceived sincerity and warmth to be more important than men), and the weak class difference for the importance of proximity was no longer significant.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrated that judgments of the importance of each

determinant of liking to having a good relationship do not necessarily match empirical findings regarding the impact of each on liking, and that beliefs about the importance of the determinants of liking differ as a function of age. Not surprisingly, sincerity and warmth were judged to be exceptionally important to friendships, and freshmen (who had recently left home and were in a relatively unfamiliar environment) indicated that familiarity was important. However, subjects perceived that competence, proximity and physical attractiveness were relatively unimportant to the maintenance of a good friendship, although the research clearly indicates that proximity is a primary determinant of liking as proximity increases both familiarity and perceptions of similarity (Carli et al., 1991). Seniors were more cognizant of the importance of physical attractiveness, competence, and proximity, perhaps as a result of experience with a myriad of friendships.

It is likely that people do not explicitly understand that one must be, or have been, physically close to another to recognize similarities and desirable qualities. Despite the fact that a wealth of literature (e.g., Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) has indicated that we do like people because they are attractive, people may be unwilling or unable to say that attractiveness positively influences our judgments of others. However, it may be that more attractive people are indeed better liked because they are more socially adept (Chaiken, 1979; Eagly et al., 1991).

Although the results of this study contribute to our understanding of others' understanding of the factors that determine liking, this study did not address whether beliefs about the determinants of liking actually influence friend choices. Moreover, we did not assess length of the friendships in question, and therefore the impact of longevity of friendship on the perception of what it takes to sustain a friendship is still in question.

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Table 1.

Freshmen and Senior Judgments of the Importance of the Determinants of Liking.

	Determinants						
	Sincerity	Familiarity	Warmth	Similarity	Competence	Proximity	Attractiveness
Freshmen	6.84	6.48_a	6.01	4.48	3.92_a	3.35	2.80_a
Senior	6.80	6.05_b	6.10	4.35	4.65_b	3.70	3.20_b
TOT.	6.82	6.27	6.06	4.42	4.29	3.53	3.00

Note. Higher numbers denote more of the trait in question. Numbers with different subscripts within each column differ at $p < .05$.